J Indian Philos
DOI 10.1007/s10781-010-9121-9

Upādāyaprajñaptiḥ and the Meaning of Absolutives: Grammar and Syntax in the Interpretation of Madhyamaka

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Abstract The article discusses the relevance of the syntactical implications of the absolutive ending (*lyabanta*) in interpreting the Madhyamaka term *upādāya-prajñapti*, and hence Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 18.24. The views of both Sanskrit and Pāli classical grammarians are taken into account, and a comparison is made between some contemporary English translations of MMK 18.24 as against Candrakīrti's commentary. The conclusion suggests that Candrakīrti is grammatically accurate and perceptive, that he may have been aware of the tradition of Candragomin's grammar, and that the structural analogy between *upādāyaprajñapti* and *pratītyasamutpāda* may be relevant in understanding the relationship between notional and existential dependence.

Keywords Madhyamaka · Sanskrit grammar · Nāgārjuna · Candrakīrti · Pāṇini · Candragomin · Buddhist philosophy

Translating the verses of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā into English seems (to me a least) a rather difficult task. In several instances, the original stanzas contain word-play which relies heavily on Sanskrit etymology; in other cases, the syntax could be read in more than one way. Sometimes, the difficulty arises from the specific sense of the grammatical forms; I believe a good example of the last instance may be the usage of absolutives (*ktvānta* and *lyabanta* in Sanskrit).

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Published online: 14 January 2011

According to its most widespread interpretation, even the compound *pratītyasamutpāda* contains an absolutive (*pratītya*).[1] However, I would like to focus on another expression, which is one of its synonyms, and which has given some troubles to translators: *upādāya prajñaptiḥ*. The phrase occurs with this word-order in the Prasannapadā, when Candrakīrti comments upon the following verse:

yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṁ tāṁ pracakṣmahe |
sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā || 24.18 ||

The expression has often been treated like a compound—although the editorial decision of de La Vallée Poussin suggests that he took the terms *upādāya* and *prajñapti* separately. I personally think that there is no difference in the sense of *upādāya prajñapti* as against *upādāyaprajñapti*.

In this article, I shall argue that Candrakīrti's inversion of the word-order is perfectly justified and that there are good reasons to understand *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* and *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* as grammatically (and syntactically) identical expressions.[2] This structural affinity may be of significance for the philosophical interpretation, and translation, of Madhyamaka texts: it points to the close relationship between existential and notional dependence—a salient feature of that system of thought.

The Form *upādāya* and the Grammatical Sense of a *lyabanta*

Upādāya is formed by adding the ending *lyap* to the root *dā*, preceded by the two prefixes *upa* and *ā*. This form is an indeclinable, if by this we wish to translate the Sanskrit technical term *avyaya*: since, it never varies, whichever its syntactical context (except of course by reason of *sandhi*). Pāṇini explicitly classifies *ktvānta* forms (which include *lyabanta* by implication) as *avyaya*s (*ktvātosunkasunaḥ* 1.1.40).[3] The form has been called in English, sometimes, *absolutive*.

[1] The alternative, which we find recorded as an opponent's view both in the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya and in the Prasannapadā, is to take *pratītya* as a *taddhitānta* form, and hence the whole compound *pratītyasamutpāda* as a *tatpuruṣa: anye punar asya codyasya parihārārtham anyathā parikalpayanti–pratir vīpsārthaḥ itau sādhava ityāh anavasthāyinaḥ utpūrvaḥ padiḥ prādurbhāvārthaḥ tāṁ tāṁ kāraṇasāmagrīṁ prati ityānāṁ samavāyenotpādaḥ pratītyasamutpāda iti (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya on 3.28 [Dwarikadass (1981)]); *apare tu bruvate–itir gamanaṁ vināśaḥ* | *itau sādhava ityāḥ* | *prati vīpsārtha ity evaṁ taddhitāntam ityaśabdaṁ vyutpādya prati prati ityānāṁ vināśinām samutpāda iti varṇayanti* (Prasannapadā on 1.1, de La Vallée Poussin (1913)).

[2] Takasaki had already noticed this point, as we shall see—although he describes *lyabanta* forms as verbs. His article also offers a rather thorough analysis of the usages of *upādāya*, *upādātṛ* and *upādāna* in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and in the Prasannapadā. The one point where I would differ from Takasaki is that he considers the range of application of *upādāyaprajñapti* as broader than that of *pratītyasamutpāda*, while I believe the latter includes the former when *pratītyasamutpāda* refers to notional dependence.

[3] The Siddhāntakaumudī gives *kṛtvā* as an example [Vasu (1982), p. 275]; the Kāśikā adds *hṛtvā* [Tripāṭhī & Malaviya (1984), p. 135]; the Bhāṣāvṛtti explicitly adds a *lyabanta*, *prakṛtya*[Cakravarti (1918), p. 9]. I also found at least one Pāli grammar that explicitly specifies how absolutive forms are a type of *abyaya*. After discussing the sense of *tuna tvāna* and *tvā*, the Padarūpasiddhi (section on *nepātikapada*) states the following: *evaṃ nāmākhyātopasaggavinimuttaṃ yad abyayalakkhaṇaṁ, taṃ sabbaṃ nipātapadan ti veditabbaṃ*. The examples given actually include instance of *yo* endings as well, amongst which most notable is *upādāya*.

In Pāṇini's system, the *sūtra* which describes the usage of *lyabanta* forms is the following:

samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle || 3.4.21 ||

This means that a form like *upādāya* is employed in reference to the same *agent* as the agent of the main action, but in reference to a prior time. It is important to stress that what we are concerned with is sameness of *agent* rather than *subject*; since the two coincide in active constructions, the corresponding English translations of absolutive phrases tend to make this distinction less evident. I would like now to turn the attention towards the Sanskrit commentarial tradition to *sūtra* 3.4.21.

The Siddhāntakaumudī rearranges the entirety of Pāṇini's *sūtras* topically, and offers a commentary to make them comprehensible in their new order, often crystallizing centuries of prior discussions into a summary of sorts. The following is the Siddhāntakaumudī's commentary to the sūtra *samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle* (3.4.21):

samānakartṛkayor dhātvarthayoḥ pūrvakāle vidyamānād dhātoḥ ktvā syāt | bhuktvā vrajati | dvitvam atantram | snātvā bhuktvā pītvā vrajati/...

When two verbal roots refer to the same agent, *ktvā* should be after the root employed in reference to the anterior time: 'Having eaten, he goes'. Being two is not a restriction: 'having bathed, having eaten, and having drunk, he goes' [...]

This part of the commentary is practically identical to the much older Kāśikā passages on the same *sūtra*. Moreover, the Kāśikā [Tripāṭhī & Malaviya (1984)] offers an important addition, also reproduced by Vasu, the editor and translator of the Siddhāntakaumudī (unfortunately, with a small syntactical inaccuracy).[4] This section emphasizes that *ktvā* or *lyap* have to refer to the same agent:

samānakartṛkayor iti kim ? bhuktavati brāhmaṇe gacchati devadattaḥ |

Why do we say 'having the same agent'? 'The Brahmin having eaten, Devadatta goes.'

This is further commented upon by Jinendrabuddhi (a Buddhist grammarian) as follows:

atra bhujikriyāyā brāhmaṇaḥ karttā vrajatikriyāyās tu devadatta iti samānakarttṛkatvābhāvaḥ |

Here the agent of the action of eating is the Brahmin, while for the action of going, it is Devadatta: therefore, there is not sameness of agent.

[4] Vasu translated *bhuktavati brāhmaṇe* as 'the Brāhmaṇa having been fed'; however, *bhuktavati* is an active form, and the Nyāsa specifies how in fact the Brāhmaṇa is the agent of the action of eating, rather than the object of the action of feeding as per Vasu's translation. See Vasu (2003).

Since the agents are different, we cannot use the absolutive. If we look at another Buddhist grammarian, Dharmakīrti, we can see that the treatment is analogous to the *Kāśik*.[5] The same is true of Puruṣottamadeva, also a Buddhist grammarian.[6]

A significant feature in the treatment of this *sūtra* by the authors of the Kāśikā is that they allow exceptions wherein the *lyabanta* does not imply strict chronological succession:

> *āsyaṁ vyādāya svapiti cakṣuḥ saṁmīlya hasatīty upasaṁkhyānam apūrvakālatvāt* ||
>
> 'Opening his mouth, he sleeps', 'Closing his eyes, he laughs': these are exceptions, because there is no temporal anteriority.

This is significant for the discussion of terms like *pratītyasamutpāda*, since if we accept the sense of strict succession between the act of depending upon (*pratītya*) and the act of arising (*samutpāda*), it would follow that the same agent should be able to perform the first action (depending upon) before having come into existence. This problem is noticed in Buddhist Abhidharma, and in fact Vasubandhu is his Abhidharmakośabhāṣya does appeal to the type of exception just mentioned in order to make sense of the term *pratītyasamutpāda*. While commenting on Abhidharmakośa 3.28, he quotes the following verse, which echoes what we just found in the Kāśikā:

> *sahabhāve'pi ca ktvāsti dīpaṁ prāpya tamo gatam* |
> *āsyaṁ vyādāya śete vā paścāc cet kiṁ na saṁvṛte* ||
>
> 'ktvā' is also there in case of simultaneity:
> 'Having gotten a light, darkness has gone';
> 'Opening his mouth, he sleeps';
> If this is afterwards, wouldn't it refer to a closed (mouth)?

Vasubandhu had also offered two alternative solutions—one would be to take *pratītya* as a noun rather than as a *lyabanta* and the other relies on the Sarvāstivāda theory of the existence of *dharma*s in the three times. It seems to me that the solution which relies on the exception (*upasaṁkhyāna*) delineated in the Kāśikā may be his own preference. There is, however, an alternative, as we shall see shortly.

We may now wish to look at the Cāndravyākaraṇa, by the prominent Buddhist grammarian Candragomin. This grammar is still close to Pāṇini and yet offers new *sūtra*s, with a modified terminology. We can see that even in this system, absolutive forms are explained in the same way, with one *very significant* addition:

> *ekakartṛkayoḥ pūrvāt* || 131 ||
>
> *ekakartṛkayor vyāpārayor madhye yaḥ pūrvavyāpāras tadarthāt ktvā bhavati* | *bhuktvā vrajati* | *dvivacanasyātantratvāt bhuktvā pītvā vrajati* | *parāpekṣayā*

[5] See Rao (1927, pp. 299-300: *samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle* (3.4.21) *samānaḥ kartā yayoḥ dhātvarthayoḥ tatra pūvakāle vatramānād dhātoḥ ktvāpratyayo bhavati* [...] *samānakartṛkayor iti kiṁ ? bhuktavati brāhmaṇe vrajati devadattaḥ* [...].

[6] Bhāṣāvṛtti [Cakravarti (1918), p. 190]: *pūrvakālārthād dhātoḥ ktvā syāt samānaś cet kartā bhavati* [...] *samānakartṛkayoḥ kiṁ ? brāhmaṇe bhuktavati sevako vrajati* [...]

vā | ekakartr̥kayor iti kim | bhuktavati devadatte yajñadatto vrajati | pūrvād iti kim | bhuṅkte ca pacati ca [...][7]

For two with one and the same agent, in reference to what is prior. Amongst two actions that have one and the same agent, for that which is the prior action, in that sense there is *ktvā*. Having eaten, he goes. Since the dual number is not determinative: having eaten, having drank, he goes. *Or, it is in the sense of dependence upon something else.*

Why do we say 'for two with one and the same agent?' Devadatta having eaten, Yajñadatta goes. Why 'in reference to what is prior?' He eats and he cooks. [...]

We notice here that the usual extension to temporal simultaneity is not found, and instead the extension is to cases of *dependence upon something else* (*parāpekṣā*). What is interesting and relevant is also that Candragomin seems to imply that the sense of dependence (*parāpekṣā*) is conveyed by the *lyabanta* ending itself, rather than by the root to which it is attached. If we follow this strictly, a term like *pratītya* should then be translated as 'depending upon the obtainment of something': since 'depending' would convey the meaning represented by the *lyabanta*, while 'obtainment' would represent the meaning of the *dhātu*.

The Cāndravyākaraṇa is the only grammar, amongst those I consulted, that gives very *direct* support to Candrakīrti's gloss of *pratītya* as *apekṣā*:

pratītyaśabdo'tra lyabantaḥ prāptāv apekṣāyāṁ vartate [...] *tataś ca hetu-pratyayāpekṣo bhāvānām utpādaḥ pratītyasamutpādārthaḥ* ||[8]

The word *pratītya* here occurs as a *lyabanta* in the sense of dependence upon obtaining (something else) [...] Therefore, the meaning of dependent arising is the arising of existent things dependent upon causes and conditions.

Perhaps some credit should be given to traditional accounts that tell us how Candragomin and Candrakīrti were personally acquainted! I also wonder whether Candragomin may have had in mind the recurrent Buddhist sense of terms like *prāpya*, *pratītya*, *upādāya*, *āśritya* and so forth. Please consider how practically all of the modern English translations of *pratītyasamutpāda* implicitly agree with Candragomin's comment (by translating *pratītya* as 'dependent').[9]

However, we are here left with an apparent complication, already highlighted while discussing of Candragomin's comments a few paragraphs above. Should *apekṣāyāṁ* be construed with *lyabantaḥ* or just with *prāptau*? In other words, is Candrakīrti in strict accordance with Candragomin, hence maintaining that *apekṣā* is the meaning of the *lyabanta* itself, or, is he glossing the meaning of the *dhātu prati+ī* with *prāpti*, and in turn, *prāpti* with *apekṣā*? In brief, do we get the *apekṣā*

7 Cāndravyākaraṇa [Chatterji (1953), p. 124]

8 Prasannapadā, initial sections [de La Vallée Poussin (1913)], p. 5.

9 Incidentally, certain features of the terminology make me think that the Pāli grammatical tradition was acquainted with and influenced by the Cāndravyākaraṇa in its treatment of absolutive forms. However, I leave it to Pāli specialists to decide.

from the *dhātu* or from the *lyabanta*? Considering that the second, extended part of Candrakīrti's etymological explanation does away with the chronological sense which is the most common for a *lyabanta*, I would think that he is in fact interpreting the *lyabanta* itself as implying *apekṣā*, hence showing remarkable similarity to Candragomin's opinion. Furthermore, Candrakīrti does not at all mention the other possible grammatical solution (the extension to cases of simultaneity), although he must have been well aware of it, considering that the Prasannapadā shows his acquaintance with the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.

To summarize, all commentators that I have consulted explain the *ktvānta* and *lyabanta* forms according to the following steps:

i. they refer to the same agent, but to a prior action;
ii. an active participle in the seventh Vibhakti , rather than *lyabanta* or *ktvānta*, has to be used when the agent is not the same;
iii. exceptions can be made in regards to strict chronological succession.

Upādāya, therefore, should refer to the action of *upādā* occurring prior to the action of *prajñapti* and having the same agent. Regarding priority, Buddhist commentators allow for a certain flexibility, so as to include instances in which it is logical, rather than chronological priority being at stake (see the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, and also see the initial sections of the Prasannapadā, both discussing *pratītya* in *pratītyasamutpāda* as a *lyabanta*).[10] In this respect, they are well in agreement with the grammatical tradition.

The reason for such flexibility, in respected to *pratītyasamutpāda*, is to solve an interesting paradox: if the actions of depending (*pratītya*) and of arising (*samutpāda*) were to be taken in a strict chronological succession, the same *dharma* could not be agent of *pratītya*, since it would not have arisen as yet. As we have seen, one grammar (the Cāndravyākaraṇa) solves the same problem differently, by directly stating that absolutive forms can be used in the sense of dependence (*apekṣā*). The same flexibility may well apply here.

Pāli Grammarians on the Same Topic

Furthermore, we may wish to take note of the opinions of classical Pāli grammars. I have already pointed out how, in accordance with Pāṇini, at least one grammarian explicitly identifies these forms as *abyaya* and gives *upādāya* as one of the examples.[11]

The Pāli Kaccāyanavyākaraṇa and its commentary explain absolutive forms in the same way as Sanskrit grammarians do:

> *pubbakāle' kakattukānaṃ tuna tvāna tvā vā* ||
>
> *pubbakāle ekakattukānaṃ dhātūnaṃ tuna tvāna tvāiccete paccayā honti vā* |
>
> *kātuna kammaṃ gacchati, akātuna puññaṃ kilissati, sattā sutvāna dhammaṃ modanti, ripuṃ jitvāna vasati, dhammaṃ sutvāna'ssa etad ahosi, ito sutvāna amutra kathayanti, sutvā jānissāma* | *evaṃ sabbattha yojetabbā* |

[10] See the discussion above.

[11] I am referring to the Padarūpasiddhi: see footnote 3 above.

For (roots) having one and the same agent, *tuna*, *tvāna* or *tvā* are used in reference to the anterior times.

In reference to the anterior time, for roots having one and the same agent, there may be alternatively one of the suffixes amongst *tuna tvāna* or *tvā*.

Having performed *kamma*, he goes; having not performed merit, he is afflicted; sentient beings, having heard the Dhamma, rejoice; having won the enemy, he dwells; having listened to the Dhamma, he had this thought; having heard from here, they tell elsewhere; having heard, we know. The same should be applied in all instances.[12]

In the commentary to the Moggālanavyākaraṇa, it is again specified that, in cases where the agent is not the same, we have to use an alternative construction (active participle in the seventh Vibhakti):

pubbekakattukānaṁ |

eko kattā yesaṃ byāpārānaṃ, tesu yo pubbo, tadatthato kriyatthā tunādayo honti bhāve, sotuna yāti, sutvāna, sutvā vā, ekakattukānan ti kiṁ? bhuttasmiṃ devadatte yaññadatto vajati, pubbāti kiṃ? bhuñjati ca pacati ca |[13]

'For those with one and the same agent, in reference to what is anterior':

Amongst actions that have one and the same agent, for the one which is prior, *tuna* and so forth occur in the sense of an activity and referring to a completed state (*bhāve*).

'Having heard (*sotuna*, *sutvāna* or *sutvā*) he goes.' Why do we say 'for those with one and the same agent?' 'Devadatta having eaten, Yaññadatta goes'. Why do we say 'to what is anterior'? 'He eats and goes'.

The treatment in the Padarūpasiddhi seems to be very much in the same vein.[14]

Candrakīrti's Commentary on 24.18

Let us now turn back to MMK 24.18, where the expression *prajñaptir upādāya* occurs, and to the Prasannapadā on the same section. Candrakīrti's reading of this passage is faithful to the grammatical underpinnings of the forms:

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[12] Kaccāyanavyākaraṇa, *kibbidhānakappa, khaṇḍa* 2, 15th aphorism and commentary. The 8th aphorism of *khaṇḍa* 4 makes it clear that forms ending in *yo* have the same sense (although I doubt anyone would raise objections on that count): *sabbehi tunādīnaṃ yo* || *sabbehi dhātūhi tunādīnaṃ paccayānaṃ yakārādeso hoti vā* | *abhivandiya, abhivanditvā, ohāya, ohitvā, upanīya, upanetvā, passiya, passitvā, uddissa, uddisitvā, ādāya, ādiyitvā* ||

[13] *Moggālanavyākaraṇa* and *vutti*, *khaṇḍa* 5, aphorism 63. The *Moggālanapañcikā,* commenting on the same aphorism, contains discussions that seems very close to the Kāśikā and quotes Pāṇini by name. In particular, it expressed the flexibility about chronological succession very well, by employing the term *sahabhāve: sahabhāvepīti byādānasupanānaṃ sahabhāvepi.*

[14] Padarūpasiddhi, aphorism 640: *pubbakālekakattukānaṃ tuna tvāna tvā vā*; and see the following sections of the commentary: *pubbakāloti pubbakriyā, eko kattā yesaṃ te ekakattukā, tesaṃ ekakattukānaṃ samānakattukānaṃ dhātūnam antare pubbakāle vattamānadhātumhā tuna tvāna tvāiccete paccayā honti vā* [...]*ekakattukānan ti kiṃ? bhutte devadatte yaññadatto vajati.*

yā ceyaṁ śūnyatā sā prajñaptir upādāya saiva śūnyatā upādāya prajñaptir iti vyavasthāpyate | *cakrādīny upādāya rathāṅgāni rathaḥ prajñapyate* |

The most important section, for our purposes, is the last: 'Having gotten the parts of a chariot like a wheel and so forth, a chariot is designated'. What I translated as 'having gotten' could be more freely translated as 'depending upon', since I believe that Candrakīrti's discussion of the term *pratītya* (equated with *apekṣā*) could well apply to *upādāya*. However, the usage of *upādāya* does suggest an analogy about 'clinging' or 'appropriation', usually working in reference to the five aggregates (the five *skandha*). The example of the parts of the chariot and the chariot is often a simile for the five aggregates and the designation of an 'I'. This is made rather clear in Chap. 22 of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, where the notion is the 'Tathāgata' and the basis for the designation are the five aggregates. See the following expression from Chap. 22:

buddhaḥ skandhān upādāya [...] 22.2;

Also consider that in the very next verse Nāgārjuna equates *upādāya* with *pratītya*:

pratītya parabhāvaṁ yaḥ so 'nātmety upapadyate || 22.3ab||

'One who depends on other-existence is fit to be 'self-less'.'

The equation is sensibly highlighted in the introductory remarks from the Prasannapadā:

atha syād yathaiva hi pratibimbakaṁ svabhāvato'saṁvidyamānam api parabhāvaṁ mukhādarśādikam apekṣya bhavati | *evaṁ ca tathāgato'pi svabhāvato'saṁvidyamāno'nāsravān pañcaskandhān upādāya parabhāvato bhaviṣyati* |

Or it could be said that: just like a reflected image, although not to be found in essence, exists in dependence upon other-existence, like a face, a mirror and so forth; in the same way a Tathāgata also, not to be found in essence, may exist from some other-existence, referring to (*upādāya*) the five aggregates free from outflows.

Again, Candrakīrti's equation of *apekṣya* with *upādāya* has good textual grounding in Nāgārjuna's own equation of *upādāya* with *pratītya*.

See also the following passages:

skandhān yady anupādāya [...] 22.5

skandhān cāpy anupādāya [...] 22.6

Furthermore, if we respect the causative sense of *prajñapyate* in verse 22.10, we can there see the same exact relationship between *upādā* (to appropriate or to depend upon) and the causative sense of *pra+jñā* (to make known or designate), especially in reference to the aggregates, as we find in 24.18. Verse 22.10 is explicitly declaring the emptiness of the object and the agent of *upādā*:

evaṁ śūnyaṁ upādānam upādātā ca sarvaśaḥ |
prajñapyate ca śūnyena kathaṁ śūnyas tathāgataḥ || 22.10 ||

> In this way, the object and agent of appropriation are by all means empty; and how could an empty Tathāgata be designated through something empty?

Candrakīrti comments on this verse by noticing that:

> *tasmāt skandhān upādāya tathāgataḥ prajñapyata iti nopapadyate* |
>
> Therefore, it is not fit that 'depending upon taking the aggregates as a reference the Tathāgata is designated'.

There is of course an ambiguity here, in the sense that *if* the Tathāgata is the *upādātṛ* the Tathāgata should function as the agent for *upādāya*, while here the necessary agent of *upādāya* must (by rule) be the agent of *prajñapyate*, which is not the Tathāgata of course. Hence, is the Tathāgata shifting from being agent to being the object? Grammatically, I believe this is correct.

However, I believe this chapter is purposely shifting between considering the Tathāgata and the *skandha*s of the Tathāgata specifically, and considering appropriation in general. In a sense, it is obvious that the Tathāgata cannot have *upādāna*—if he did, he would not be a Tathāgata at all. It is fairly common in Buddhist literature to distinguish between the *skandha*s as such versus the *upādānaskandha*s, i.e. the *skandha*s as objects of appropriation or clinging. We know from an earlier part of his commentary (to 20.8) that Candrakīrti has identified the five aggregates as *upādāna*. His remarks in this case very much respect the grammar of the verse.

I have noticed how here we find the same relationship that occurs between *prajñaptir* and *upādāya* in 24.18, according to Candrakīrti's own understanding, which refers it back to a simile for the five aggregates. To restate this in simple words, the action of designation or making known (*prajñapyate*) a Tathāgata, for Nāgārjuna, happens after having acquired or depending upon (*upādāya*) the five *skandha*s. Thus, the root text of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā lends authority to Candrakīrti's glosses to 24.18; not only in terms of equating *pratītyasamutpāda* and *upādāya prajñapti*, but also for the equation between *upādāya prajñapti* and *śūnyatā*.

Candrakīrti's reading brings out a likely implication in Nāgārjuna's verse: *pratītyasamutpāda* and *upādāyaprajñapti* are synonymous expressions, partly by the force of their having an identical syntax. Moreover, the next verse can be read as a continuous argument only on the basis of such structural identity between *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* and *upādāya prajñaptiḥ*:

> *apratītya samutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate* |
> *yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate* || 24.19 ||

If *upādāyaprajñapti* is not the same process as *pratītyasamutpāda*, this verse loses continuity from the last half of the preceding verse. Moreover, we can clearly see a further usage of a *lyabanta* with an implied object in *apratītya* (a feature which is in common with *upādāya* of 24.18 and that I am about to discuss in some more detail).

Further Considerations about the Usage of Absolutives

There is one further sense of *upādāya* that is worth some attention. In sentences which explain how the same thing can be called with more than one name (a process akin to forming different *prajñapti*s), *upādāya* is used in a way best translated with 'in reference to' or 'having taken into account' (the second translation being more respectful of the etymology). See for example Vasubhandhu's Pañcaskandhaka [Xuezhu & Steinkellner (2008)], explaining the synonyms of *vijñāna*:

> *cittaṁ mano'pi tat* | *citratāṁ manaḥsanniśrayatāṁ copādāya* |
>
> That is also '*citta*' and '*manas*': taking into accounts its variety (*citratā*) and its quality of being a support for mind (*manaḥsanniśrayatā*).

A related usage can also be found in the Abhidharmasamuccaya [Pradhan (1950)], Lakṣaṇasamuccaya (initial sections):

> *kim upādāya skandhāḥ pañcaiva* |
>
> Taking what into account are the aggregates (said to be) only five?

Similar examples abound; what I wished to highlight is the sense of *reference*, which may have some relevance in examples such as the designation of a 'chariot' or a 'Tathāgata' in reference to their parts.

One may nonetheless object that the 'chariot' and the 'parts' do not appear in verse 24.18 and are a somewhat arbitrary commentarial addition: I believe this would be insensitive to a recurrent usage of absolutives without a specific object.

Although the corresponding English expressions may sound awkward without explicating the object, one should not be particularly surprised to notice that the expression *prajñaptir upādāya* lacks an explicit object. In fact, even here *upādā* can be understood as having a direct object, except that the object is implied—this is also how Candrakīrti understands it, as far as I can tell. Usages of transitive absolutive with an implied object are fairly common in Sanskrit: take for example this short sentence from the Karmavibhaṅga:

> *dṛṣṭvā janam āmantrayate* [...]
> Having seen, he addresses the people [...][15]

Here *janam* is not the object of *dṛṣṭvā*, but of *āmantrayate*. We know that the object of *dṛṣṭvā* is something else thanks to the context. The English translation is awkward, however such is the difference of idiom that in Sanskrit omitting, or rather implying, the agent or object is in fact occasionally more elegant than expressing it. Especially when the object is something unspecified ('something'), the omission is

[15] This sentence is found in the initial sections, the frame-story of the son of Taudeya, p. 178 in Vaidya's text. Kudo's transliteration (p. 6) shows a slightly corrupt reading: *dṛ(2v3)ṣṭvā [tv] punāntarjaṇam āmantrayate* |.

common.[16] Incidentally, it seems to me that *upādāya* is itself used with an implied object in Nidānasamyukta 12.2 and 12.5:[17]

ato vā punar upādāyaiteṣāṁ vānyatamena |

The negative of *upādāya*, i.e. *anupādāya*, appears with an implied object in Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 22.6:

skandhāṁś cāpy anupādāya nāsti kaścit tathāgataḥ |
yaś ca nāsty ***anupādāya*** *sa upādāsyate katham* ||

This is also the case with the usages of the *lyabanta* form *pratītya* in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā itself. As I pointed out briefly, the verse following the section we are discussing is a good case in point:

apratītya samutpanno dharmo kaścin na vidyate | 24.19ab |

Here *apratītya* occurs as a *lyabanta* with an implied object, therefore exactly in the same way *upādāya* occurs earlier. In Sanskrit, this is neither unusual nor awkward.

The same seems to hold for Pāli. Let us take for example the following passage from the *Samyuttanikāya:*[18]

upādāya āvuso ānanda asmīti hoti no anupādāya ~ rūpam upādāya asmīti hoti no anupādāya

I believe the topic of the passage to be none other than how the notion of 'I exist' occurs after the appropriation of the five aggregates (*rūpa* indeed is the first aggregate). The following sections of the same text in fact extend the statement to the other four aggregates. What the passage is doing is to first say that:

'Long lived Ānanda, 'I exist' occurs after having appropriated (something), not without having appropriated'

or alternatively:

'Long lived Ānanda, 'I exist' occurs depending upon (something), not without depending upon (something).

In this section, *upādāya* is used with an implied object (something), exactly as in Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 24.18. As I mentioned earlier, using absolutive forms with

[16] Another example is the form *upetya*, which is also found in the Catuṣpariṣatsūtra, and is recurrent throughout Buddhist literature in the context of a similar narrative (someone *having approached* the place where the Bhagavān, or occasionally someone else, is staying). See some examples of *lyabanta* usages with an implied object from the Nidānasamyukta: *upetyāyuṣmatā* [...] 6.3; *upetya bhagavatpādau* [...] 17.1; *upetya bhagavatā sārdham* [...]18.1; *upetya bhagavatpādau* [...] 19.1; *dṛṣṭvā ca punar* [...] 20.3; *śrutvā ca* [...] 20.21; *upetyāṣyumatā* [...] 22.3; *upetya yāvad* [...] 22.11; *upetya bhagavatpādau* [...] 22.18; *upetyāyuṣmatā* [...] 23.2; *upetya bhagavatpādau* [...] 24.25. Examples with *upetya* are particularly relevant, since this is a partial synonym of *pratītya* and hence of *upādāya*.

[17] Quoting the Nidānasamyukta is relevant here, considering how the MMK shows significant thematic and terminological affinities with several *sūtra*s in that collection.

[18] III, 105 in the PTS edition, Feez (1890, 1975). Berger understands this passage very differently from how I do, in line with his overall interpretation of the grammatical sense of *lyabanta* forms, which I will discuss below.

implied objects is neither rare nor awkward in Sanskrit, especially when the object is an unspecified x: and I believe here we can see how the same works for Pāli.

In the next step, the Pāli passage specifies the object of the action of *upādāya*:

'Having appropriated form, 'I exist' occurs, not without having appropriated.'

This is very much in line with Candrakīrti's commentary, where he offers an example of a possible object of appropriation/dependence (the parts of a chariot) for a specific notion (a chariot) to occur. The logic of the two texts appears to be symmetric, which makes Candrakīrti rather in accord with this Pāli usage. Candrakīrti hints at the parallel by choosing the example of a chariot and its parts, this being a well-known simile for the self and the aggregates. In other words, Candrakīrti's commentary is in line both with a common understanding of *lyabanta* forms, as well as with their usage in non-Mahāyāna sources.

Consider furthermore how a Pāli commentary glosses the term *upādāya* in this same passage as:

upādāya ti āgamma ārabbha sandhāya paṭicca[19]

Most interesting here is the gloss as *paṭicca* (Skt.*pratītya*), which once again is in accordance with Candrakīrti's interpretation (wherein *upādāya* = *pratītya*).

Translating 24.18 into English

There exist several alternative published translations of verse 24.18. I will argue that some of them are grammatically not so convincing; others are acceptable; and somewhat surprisingly, one of the most accurate is found in a work that relied on the Tibetan rather than the Sanskrit text.

The two translations which I consider grammatically unfeasible are Kalupahana's and Berger's (I somehow wonder whether the second may be influenced by the first).

In Kalupahana's case, it seems to me that the term *prajñaptiḥ* may have been taken to represent the object of the action of *upādāya*, rather than the main action that follows the one represented by the absolutive. Kalupahana translates

sā prajñaptir upādāya

as

'That is dependent upon convention'.[20]

I believe this could work only if the expression had been **prajñaptim upādāya*. On the other hand, here *prajñaptiḥ* is in the first *vibhakti* and I do not see how it could be taken as the object of an active construction: please consider that absolutives always carry an active sense (as all Sanskrit and Pāli grammarians specify with no exception).

[19] Sāratthappakāsinī (PTS II, 308) *ad* SN 3.2.4.1 (PTS III, 105–106), Woodward (1932/1977).

[20] Kalupahana (1986).

A similar reading of what constitutes the object in the sentence is to be found in a more recent translation by Berger. Berger in fact offers a lengthy argument in favor of the grammatical and lexical plausibility of taking *upādāya* as an 'intransitive gerund',[21] under the following premise:

> [...] many Saṇskṛta [sic] indeclinable can have either transitive or intransitive meanings, and as the latter they may qualify a noun or even an entire independent clause passively without a direct object. The term *upādāya*, therefore, can modify a noun or a phrase, as in ''having been received'' or ''having been acquired,'' which gives us the translation of MMK 24:18 above.[22]

As I have discussed above, I do not think that *upādāya* is intransitive (it is a *sakarmakadhātu*)—rather, it has a non-expressed, non-specified object. Furthermore, I see no grammatical plausibility in taking *upādāya passively*. Berger's translates

> *sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā* || 24.18cd ||

as:

> 'This notion (emptiness), once acquired, is truly the middle path.'[23]

For the reasons I have just discussed, I believe this translation to be grammatically unconvincing: it seems to me that *upādāya* does not *qualify prajñapti* as the object of the action of acquiring, but rather represents an action which occurs prior to the action of *prajñapti*, and which is performed by the same agent.

I remarked that one of the most faithful translations may actually have been based on the Tibetan. I was referring to Garfield's rendering:

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained as emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way.[24]

There are two points, though, where I would differ from Garfield: not so much in the grammatical understanding, but in the emphasis. The first is that *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* may be better rendered with 'dependent arising' rather than 'dependently co-arisen' (which would rather suggest *pratītyasamutpannaḥ*). Furthermore, the second half could be (misleadingly) read as implying that the equation is between the *explanation* of dependent arising as being emptiness, and the dependent designation. In other words, Garfield's wording sounds as 'We explain what is dependently co-arisen as being emptiness, and such explanation is a dependent designation'. I do not understand the equation in this manner: although, due to a recurrent usage of pronouns as referring to entire clauses, this option is not impossible (as pointed out by Oetke), it seems like a more roundabout way to understand the syntax, and may not be the favored option. Rather, in accordance

21 Berger (2010, p. 53).

22 Berger, ibidem, p. 47.

23 Berger, ibidem, p. 47.

24 Garfield, (1995).

with Candrakīrti, I believe that the equation implies four terms: dependent arising = emptiness = dependent designation = the middle way. I would translate the verse as follows:

> Whatever is dependent arising, we call that 'emptiness',
> the latter is the act of designating after relying (upon something), and is itself the middle path.

We can also of course rephrase 'designating after relying' simply as 'dependent designation', or even 'designating in dependence upon taking up as a reference' especially if we take Candragomin's comment about *parāpekṣā* as authoritative (see above).

This is in line with Candrakīrti's remark, that emptiness, dependent designation and the middle path are specific names for dependent arising:

> *tad evaṁ pratītyasamutpādasyaivetā viśeṣasaṁjñāḥ śūnyatā upādāya prajñaptiḥ madhyamā pratipad iti* |

As I stated at the outset, I consider that Candrakīrti's change of the word-order into *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* is perfectly justified; it is quite likely that the word-order in the *kārikā* may wholly depend from stylistic and metric reasons, and putting the absolutive (which represents a prior action) before the term expressing the main action (in this case, *prajñaptiḥ*) is almost a commentator's 'duty'. From whichever possible angle, Candrakīrti's exegesis is sensitive to the grammatical underpinnings and hence the syntactical structure of the verse—therefore, I would argue that it should be taken as a template for any possible translation.[25]

Conclusions

Absolutive constructions tend to be translated rather freely, without necessarily respecting the two implications of sameness of agent and chronological succession—simply to avoid very awkward English expressions. 'Dependent arising' for

[25] I would have to agree with how Claus Oetke (p. 6) reconstructs the likely syntactical purport of the verse: '(a) Pratītyasamutpāda and emptiness amount to the same. (b) Emptiness and upādāyprajñapti amount to the same. (c) Emptiness and the middle path amount to the same.

Since—on the intended reading—_amount to the same as' represents also a transitive relation (C) is (cognitively) equivalent to: (C*)

(a) Pratītyasamutpāda and emptiness amount to the same.
(b) Pratītyasamutpāda and upādāyaprajñapti amount to the same.
(c) Pratītyasamutpāda and the middle path amount to the same.'

Overall I find Oetke's arguments against Arnold's reconstruction rather convincing.

Takasaki starts his own article on *upādāyaprajñapti* with the following remark:

'In this verse Nāgārjuna aimed to emphasize the synonymity of four important terms which elucidate the fundamental concepts of Buddhism, namely (1) *pratītyasamutpāda*, (2) *śūnyatā*, (3) *upādāya-prajñapti*, and (4) *madhyamā pratipad*.'

This is again in accordance with Candrakīrti, and Oetke's interpretation seems to remain compatible with this basic premise.

pratītyasamutpāda is in itself a case in point, since the actual implications of using a *lyabanta* as *pratītya* are lost in the English translation. We also have found that commentators, both in the grammatical tradition as well as Buddhist philosophers, justify setting aside the chronological implication. However, the English translations, unfortunately, render invisible a paradox which has been very fruitful in terms of philosophical debates: consider that the structure of this paradox about the temporal displacement of an effect and the cause on which it is supposed to depend is not dissimilar from the structure of the Madhyamaka refutation of causality.

Upādāya prajñaptiḥ functions within a syntactical structure identical to that of *pratītyasamutpāda:* this is well highlighted by the Prasannapadā, as was also noted by Takasaki.[26] *Upādāya prajñaptiḥ*, as interpreted by Candrakīrti, may seem to carry *only* a very specific sense of *pratītyasamutpāda*: in particular, the example of the designation of a 'chariot' in dependence upon its parts, not unlike the designation of a 'Tathāgata' in dependence upon the aggregates, is a case of a notion arising in dependence upon a feasible basis of imputation (rather than, say, a sprout arising from a seed). Yet, considering the importance of the passage from notional dependence to existential dependence in Madhyamaka, one cannot underestimate the wide applicability of this sense within that system. Mādhyamikas are the only Indian Buddhist thinkers (that I am aware of) to assert that the first type of dependence entails the second and to imply that notional dependence is the most *fundamental* type of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

This is just one instance where a careful reading of an authoritative commentary is greatly helpful in understanding the grammatical and in turn philosophical nuances of a root text. Once the grammar of the verse is better discerned, we can appreciate the accuracy of the four-term equation as explained by Candrakīrti (*pratītyasamutpāda* = *śūnyatā* = *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* = *madhyamā pratipat*). The most difficult passage in this equation is that *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* = *upādāya prajñaptiḥ*, since it is not easy to offer an English translation that may neither i. mislead about the precise sense of *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* or ii. make it unclear as to whether *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* is equated with *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* or with the entirety of the previous expression (which, as I have mentioned earlier, seems to me a less likely option).

I believe that both drawbacks may in turn detract from the accuracy of one's philosophical interpretation, and that both could be avoided by reading carefully Candrakīrti's laying out of the *kārikā's* grammatical structure—this being only one instance at hand.

In particular, not to render the equation between *pratītyasamutpādaḥ* and *upādāya prajñaptiḥ* would mean to miss one of the few explicit statements by

[26] 'Especially significant is its identification with *pratītyasamutpāda* and its similarity with the latter in its verbal construction (gerund + noun) have escaped scholarly observation' (p. 1452).

I would like to remark that from the perspective of Sanskrit traditional grammar, *lyabanta* forms are not verbs, if by verb we mean something that falls within the verbal system (i.e. a *tiṅanta*); rather, they are indeclinables (*avyaya*). Considering that Pāṇini's classifications of parts of speech rely primarily on morphology rather than semantics or even syntax, this is an important distinction when we try to understand the formation of a compound having the structure of *lyabanta* + *subanta*.

Nāgārjuna wherein he identifies notional and existential dependence; and such feature sets Madhyamaka apart from other systems of Buddhist thought in India.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank Jan Westerhoff for bringing to my attention Douglas Berger's recent article offering a new interpretation of Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 24.18. Also, I would like to thank Douglas Berger for continued discussion on the topic, and Phyllis Granoff for very useful remarks and suggestions. Ultimately this article is indebted to David S.Ruegg, who noticed how Berger's interpretation may be grammatically unconvincing. The research which made this article possible was kindly funded by a grant from Mahidol University.

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